

Original Paper

A Sociocultural Approach to Funeral Jokes in the Moaaga Community in Burkina Faso: Analysis of the Forms, Place and Role of Amusements in a Mourning Situation

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Abstract

This study conducted in the moaaga environment in the province of Namentenga in Burkina Faso aims to pinpoint and analyze the forms of jokes taking place during traditional funerals. It is built on research hypotheses which show that during funerals, jokes take many forms, play an important role in relaxing the atmosphere while fulfilling many functions. This study, which is part of the overall framework of the sociology of culture, allows us to identify three types of jokes. On the one hand, there are the jokes involving the retention of corpses, demands for payment of funeral procession pass fees, provocative speeches and songs, as well as physical struggles. On the other hand, we have the jokes developed by the bi-paagba (daughters-in-law), the yagense (grandsons) and the crowd through dances, musical entertainment and comical sacrificial gestures, claims for money, meat, millet beer (dolo) and food from their uncles and aunts (pugdba). Finally, we have the jokes played by specific characters such as the Kɔ-togsa (funeral announcer) and her clown, the mask of the Yarsés, and the one between the Fulani, the Yarsés and the masks etc. These jokes have undeniable entertaining, symbolic, social, cultural and educational functions, through the lessons of solidarity and compassion learned.

Keywords

Forms, Functions, Funeral jokes, Moose

1. Introduction

Like other African and Burkinabe communities, the Moose (Note 1) have always used subterfuges to play down difficult situations such as mourning. It is a fact that “*To laugh is proper to man*” (Rabelais

F, 1542). However, laughing in certain circumstances, like mourning, can cause a cultural shock or social discomfort. Thomas Louis-Vincent (1982, p. 43) gives a good description of the atmosphere that prevails in mourning. In his view,

Social communication seems to be reduced to silence, imposing a heavy atmosphere at gatherings. Farewells organized in honor of the deceased, especially if he or she had a high social profile, are often difficult moments.

In order to reconcile the occurrence of a dramatic situation with its trivialization, or even the importance of maintaining laughter despite of tears, the Moose use various forms of jokes that can be interesting to analyze from a cultural and sociological point of view. It was with this in mind that this study has been initiated, with the aim of identifying and analyzing the forms of jokes used at traditional funerals, and even in some modern cases, with a view to gaining a better understanding of their sociocultural place and role. Therefore, the theme issue could well be summed up in this main question: What is the place and role of jokes during traditional funerals among the Moose? This leads us to the following secondary questions: What are the forms of jokes that can be observed during mourning in Moaaga country? What are the objectives of these practices? What are the sociocultural functions that we can keep from jokes during funerals? The answer to these questions leads us to a number of hypotheses, the main one stating that jokes during times of mourning in moaaga community occupy an important place in this society. As for the secondary hypotheses, they point out that during funerals in a moaaga environment, jokes take several forms, play an important role in relaxing the atmosphere and fulfill multiple functions which ennoble their sociocultural role of choice.

To address this issue, the article is built around the following main themes: circumstances of crying and occasion for laughter: forms of jokes in funeral situations (1), the place and role of choice given to jokes in mourning situations (2) and discussion of the results (3).

2. Method

2.1 Methodological Approach and Theory

In this research, we favored a qualitative approach and the use of functionalist theory as tools for collecting and analyzing material such as funeral jokes.

As the subject is eminently anthropological, it could only be dealt with using a qualitative approach, which allows us for in-depth analysis with a small number of respondents. We carried out surveys in the form of informal discussions with our interviewees in a number of circumstances and occasions.

We also favored the theory of functionalism because it is the most appropriate, giving a preponderant place to the function of the elements of a system and the way the system works. Funerals and jokes are all part of the Moaaga community system of representation and have specific functions. Finally, as functionalism is a type of explanation based on the breakdown of a system into its component parts and explains the functioning of a system in terms of the capacity of its component parts to integrate with one another, this study aims to reconstruct this type of relationship between funerals, jokes and the

overall functioning of this Moaaga community.

2.2 Study Area

Our study takes place in the province of Namentenga, especially in some villages surrounding the town of Boulsa (the provincial capital). In particular, many examples are also drawn from national realities. Among the important territories of the Moogo kingdoms, Namentenga founded by Naaba Namendé features very prominently. Moreover, it is written: "*the ancestor of the royal family of Bulsa is Naaba Namendé, eldest son of Naaba Oubri (Moogo Naaba)*" (Note 2). The history of Boulsa or Bulsa, capital of the Namentenga province, has rich aspects in the continuation of Moogo but gives room to the notion of funerals (kūre in Moore language). Our study area was this space, a strong symbol of Moaaga culture. Even if we focused on a few villages, the realities observed and described can be generalized to the entire settlement area.

The funerary practices observed and examined were carried out using the tools of participant observation, interviews and life stories, mainly in the village of Zambanga (7 km from Boulsa) in this study area. Indeed, over the last ten years, we have been working on funerals, the role of undertakers, the issues of disappearance of sacred objects, the richness of certain oral heritage of this village and its surroundings. A number of works have been published and this research adds a link to the body of sociocultural knowledge in this field.

2.3 Target Population and Sample

Our target population was therefore the people living in the area described above. Purposive sampling was used. Being aware that not everyone we met could provide satisfactory answers to our questions, we selected our interviewees on the basis of their ability to describe how funerals are conducted, present cases of joking and analyze the reasons for and objectives of these games and jousting.

For data collection, we observed five (5) funeral practices (burial, dry funeral, final funeral). As a target audience, we interviewed 42 people including direct actors in these jokes, relatives of the deceased and resource people from the environment under study between March 25, 2022 and March 25, 2024. We also used documentary research to conduct a review on the theme and to share experiences between communities at the national level.

3. Result

3.1 Circumstances of Crying and Occasions of Laughter: Forms of Jokes in Funeral Situations

Burkina Faso or former Upper Volta is home to several communities or ethnic groups of which the Moose account for more than 58% of the population (Presidency of Faso, 2021). According to Vincent Sedogo (2008, p. 25), the country of the Moose, or even referred to by the first colonial authors as "Mossi Country", "Mossi Kingdom", or even "Kingdom of Ouagadougou" was in fact only a polyarchy.

In the moaaga environment, apart from the "red death" (accidental death) or the "young death" (death having struck a young person who did not leave any grown-up children or simply death in the prime of

life), the other deaths (from the age of 50) give rise to funeral celebrations. It is precisely at these types of funerals that jokes are authorized on the assumption that those who have passed away have gone back to whence they came and, above all, that they lived well. The term "funeral" is used to refer to all funeral activities, from the announcement of death to the grand or final funeral. This includes burial, the 'third day funeral' (for men) or the 'fourth day funeral' (for women) (*nangbing sagbo*), the 'fresh funeral' (*Kv-toagsa*) a funeral held a few weeks after death, and the grand or final funeral (*Kv-sat m*).

The main question in this section is to find out the different types of jokes that are used during these funerals. We have identified three main types. These are the physical and verbal jousting for fun that takes place between groups in a 'joking kinship' situation, between groups in circumstantial funeral jokes and, finally, individual joke games.

3.1.1 Intergroup Jokes Already in a Situation of "Joking Kinship": Relatives for Life, Relatives for Death

We are tempted to conclude that the phenomenon or practice of joking kinship withstands the vagaries of death, because once links are sealed between two communities, groups or individuals, they remain there during the lifetime of the actors. We are therefore relatives from life until death, just as in kinship or in real life, since even in death, no individual in the allied community is spared from ribald words and actions.

Firstly, with regard to intergroup funeral jokes in situations of joking kinship, we have, during the burial, the retention of the corpse and demands for the payment of taxes. When a member of a given group or community dies, during the burial, scenes of struggle ensue between the grieving community and the one that is allied by joking kinship. The funeral procession may be stopped and prevented from moving forward by the joking relatives. To overcome this obstacle, the community that has lost a member must pay for the passage of the corpse. This is how a voluntary contribution will be established and the money collected will be used as the passage tax costs. This practice is not unique to the Moose. In several Burkinabe cultural communities, this game is permanent. This was the case of the blockade that was set up on 31 January 2024 at the entrance to the town of Bobo by the Fulani at the funeral procession of Bognésa Arsène Ye, a former Minister and Chairman of the National Assembly. There is a joking kinship between the Bobo (the ethnic group of the deceased Ye) and the Fulani.

As another case, during the funeral mass of Mrs. Véronique Nana (Note 3) on March 24, 2024 at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Ouagadougou, Father Ki, a Samo (joking relatives of the Moose), seized the coffin in front of the altar and requested that the Moose pay. He required a special collection as a crossing fee. And this was done.

Sometimes, joking parents are ready to "rob" the body of the deceased in order to be paid during wakes or farewells. This was the case during the funeral of Cardinal Zoungrana (from the moaaga ethnic group) in Ouagadougou in June 2000 where it was necessary to guard the deceased to prevent the Samos from removing the remains.

Another form of retention is the occupation of the grave. This occurs when the corpse is to be buried.

Joking relatives invade the grave where the coffin is to be placed and demand taxes. At the burial of the late mother of the former Head of State Roch Marc Christian Kaboré (a Mossi), Minister Bonané Maurice Diendonné and his Samo brothers invaded the grave and demanded for payment.

From our observations and questioning, we realize that this first form of joking is not unique to the Moose. It exists among other ethnic groups in Burkina Faso. Also, the money that is demanded at the funeral procession or at the grave is not a required amount and will not be used for personal or commercial purposes. For example, the money that was collected at the church, at the priest's request, went to an orphanage. Besides, the requester always say that what has been donated is small. After announcing the amount received, Father Ki told the congregation: *"The Moose are worthless. They were only able to contribute the sum of 200,000 to save the coffin of Mother Véronique. What a shame. So her value is only around the modest sum of 200,000 CFA. She will be disappointed with you because she did not know you would shame her"*. Finally, the practice is inclusive and cuts across all religions. This shows that practice is a real social phenomenon and a heritage known to all.

The second aspect of intergroup funeral jokes in a situation of joking kinship also concerns provocative speeches and singings. As from the announcement of the death until the different funerals, the joking relatives of the deceased person will use socially discourteous speeches and songs tending to express a kind of joy following the departure for afterlife. Comments such as: *"he/she has run away with my money"*, *"he/she is worthless because how can he/she let himself/herself be fooled by death"*, *"finally, we are happy to see that the number of family members is decreasing"*, *"we will be able to quietly eat or drink (the deceased's favorite dish or drink) without being spied on by so-and-so (the deceased's name)"* are made to provoke, to joke according to the principles and rules of joking kinship. They teach the principle: *"of simulating conflict to avoid actually entering into conflict with the other and that joking relatives insult each other, making fun of each other to indicate the possibility of disagreement, but they end up joking to indicate the obligation to accept each other"* (Kouraogo, 2013, p. 122).

A practical example of a discourteous speech that we witnessed and listened to was that of Dr Paré Emile, on the occasion of the funeral of the father of Roch Marc Christian Kaboré, former Head of State of Burkina Faso. Speaking on behalf of the Samo, the joking relatives of the Moose, he explained that Roch Kaboré had a talent for sacrificing his loved ones in order to gain power. He is said to have killed his mother in 2014 to get his first term in 2015, and he will do it again in 2019 with the death of his father to get the 2nd term in 2020. To a foreign listener, this speech seems offset and surprising. But it brought great bursts of laughter among those who are used to these jokes. For other Burkinabe communities, including the Samo, the Moose love power to the point of being able of any sacrifice to get it.

As Pierre Diarra and Jean-Marie Privat (2019) explain so well: *"Not only do people maintaining joking relationships with the deceased allow themselves to break an eloquent silence, but they also allow themselves to tell jokes, to throw spades, without sparing the deceased and his family"* According to them, what is told is so mocking that it is difficult for the audience, despite their sadness, to settle for

silent, light or muffled laughter.

In addition to the comments, joking parents can also sing comical and provocative songs either which repeat the same sarcasms or evoke certain aspects of the life of the person concerned. The songs are often followed by dances and demands for money and are intended to play joy while sadness dominates the atmosphere.

To close this subsection of jokes, we would like to mention physical struggles. During the blockages of funeral processions, the invasion of graves and as well as the rite of *rag-giligri* (tour of the market), real fights can take place between communities and groups of joking relatives. They can take on the appearance of real fights because they can cause injuries. But, it's just a game and no one should cross the lines to start a real fight.

To conclude this sub-section on jokes, we would like to mention the physical struggles. Both during the blocking of funeral processions, the invading of tombs and during the *rag-giligri* rite (going round the market), and real struggles can take place between communities and groups of joking relatives. They can take on the appearance of real brawls because they can result in blows and injuries. But this is just a game and no-one should cross the lines to trigger a real fight.

3.1.2 Circumstantial Intergroup Funeral Jokes: Funerals, Cantor of Fairs and Festivities of Specific Social Strata

We have noticed other forms of circumstantial intergroup jokes. Here, these are groups who will joke only during the funerals. Usually, they do not develop these types of games. We have identified three types. The main actors are the *bi-paagba* (daughters-in-law), *yagense* (grandsons) and the funeral crowd.

The *bi-pagba* (daughters-in-law) play an important role in funerals. This social stratum is made up of the wives of all the male members considered to be the sons of the deceased. In other words, the deceased is the father-in-law or mother-in-law of this social category of this large community members called *buudu* (in Moore). In various ways, they will play funeral jokes.

Firstly, they will take part in the various dances of the entertainment musical troupes, either by dancing comically or by dressing up in atypical and hilarious outfits. They will also use gestures and mimicry. For example, they will use millet stalks to give themselves extra height to match the masks (see picture 1) and will wear belts made from worn-out loincloths tied around their hips to imitate those of the *warba* dancers.



Figure 1. Daughters-in-Law Imitating Masks



Figure 2. They Imitate Masks and Drummers

Source: Dr KOURAOGO.

Also, with used cans and boxes (Figure 2), they will make drums that they will play loudly in the company of actual drummers.

Secondly, during the sacrificial rites of chickens and cattle, they would present themselves with objects (wood or iron, etc.) to which they would attach ropes to simulate animals and chickens to be sacrificed for the dead. Likewise, when the other members take part in the collection by putting a few coins or banknotes in the baskets during funeral wakes, they will put papers or tree leaves or even pebbles in the baskets.

As for the *yagense* or grandsons/granddaughters, they can be considered as all the children of the *bi-pagba* on the mother's side and those of the children (men and women) of the disappeared member of the whole extended family. According to Lallemand (1978), a *yagenga* is a maternal nephew entrusted to or living with his uncles and who represents a replacement for his mother. In this way, the

sister (*pugdba*) who has been sent to live in her husband's residence unit "sends back" a son to help her patrilineage.

As soon as the head of the family dies, the grandsons (who occupy a privileged position with their uncles) henceforth declare themselves owners of their deceased uncle's court and claim to ensure its temporary management. Moreover, traditions entrust them with this role of transitory management of the deceased's court. In fact, they are the ones who open the funeral procession with the rite which consists of killing a dog, carrying it around the funeral court three times before the undertakers carry the corpse to do the same tours. This is the start of multiple episodes of jokes.

At funerals, grandsons and granddaughters ask their uncles and aunts (*pugdba*) for money. For them, these events are festive occasions and they tease everyone for pennies. For example, they will sue the *ku-bissi* (the children of the deceased, now orphaned and assimilated) to claim the money, known as *yagen-ligdi* (grandson's money). Very often, verbal jousting takes place to convince them to hand over the money. They may even search and try to empty their uncles' pockets, leading to chases and dodges. The grandsons/daughters also claim portions of meat, local beer (*dolo*) and food. There are even specific portion of meat that are rightfully theirs. To gain possession of and benefit from these, they have to be uncompromising in their demands for these portions. This can lead to fights and verbal jousting between them and the holders of these portions.

Finally, there is the *rag-saasgo* session which can lead to fun. This is an operation of "looting" or "*compulsory collection in the market*" which consists of collecting goods (especially treats) from all sellers in a symbolic and reasonable manner because seizure of valuable objects is forbidden. Dealers must not refuse this collection and samplers must not exaggerate" (Kouraogo, 2022). This act of symbolic looting may encounter small resistance from the stand owners who will not agree that a given good is taken. This often again gives right to verbal and physical jousting.

From all the above, the joking character is evident in these acts. It lies in the fact that all these constant and insistent claims are about worthless things that normally are not coveted. Apparently, we can make it seem like we are fighting over things we can do without. It is therefore the defense of a right and principles that drive us to strive for this. Refusing that to you seems like you were de facto excluded from this category. There would be dramatic social consequences if they were denied the right to pennies, meat, drink, food or treats.

So far, we have presented intergroup funeral jokes. Let us review those of individuals illustrating jokes either in the case of kinship once again or in the case of circumstantial jokes.

3.1.3 Jokes Played by Specific Individuals

In this section, we examine jokes embodied by individuals who play specific roles or occupy specific statuses. The forms of jokes they play are either inspired by joking kinship or from circumstantial joke in mourning situation.

First, we have the character of *Kv-togsa* (funeral announcer) or the funeral mascot. When an elderly man dies, a woman is chosen from among the daughters-in-laws to play the role of *Kv-togsa*. She is a

joke character as she wears the clothes, holds the inseparable objects of the deceased (cane, pick, sabre, pipe, etc.). She must also imitate the favorite mimics, gestures and passions of the deceased. In public places (markets, meetings, parties), she must continue to bring to life the persona of the deceased that she embodies by drinking, eating and living as he would have done if he were still alive. Given that she is wearing the deceased's old clothes, there is a disturbing resemblance between her and the deceased at first glance. This creates astonishment but also amusement for many members of the community. This imitation joke can last for a year, as it goes from the first funerals (held just 2-3 months after the death) to the final funerals.

Also, during final funerals, thanks to joking kinship, the *Kv-togsa* has its clown. If there is a community that plays joking kinship with that of the deceased, one of its women can dress up like the *Kv-togsa*, comes and provokes her. Whatever one does, the other will do, and they will tease one another by imitating the gestures, voice and ticks of the deceased. This is the scene we see in the picture below. A moaaga *Kv-togsa* is being imitated by a woman from the Yarsé sub-group, in keeping with the joking kinship.



Figure 3. The Funeral Mascot (Right) and Its Joking Relatives (left?)

Source: Dr KOURAOGO.

Then we have the yarse mask which imitates the moaaga one. Let us remember that there is a joking relationship between the Yarsés and the Moose even if they all belong to the same large "moose" group. On the occasion of the burial ceremonies of a Moaaga from the village of Zambanga in the commune of Boulsa, we noted the striking presence of an extraordinary mask and it is made by the Yarsés, certainly to provoke the real masks. Indeed, by custom, the Yarsés do not have a mask culture and moreover, they are chased at each ceremony by these masks. Making a mask of another type to

compete with the Moose, the Yarsés have taken a step into provocation and above all into joking.



Figure 4. A yarsé Mask



Figure 5. A Moaaga Mask

Source: Dr KOURAOGO.

These images show the provocation of the Yarsés. The patched-up mask is a real buffoon. It is made from old clothes, wears shoes and has certain parts of its body outside. The real mask, however, is called a ghost because it must not show any signs of being human. Otherwise, by this act, the Yarsés want to demystify the mask to show that it is a human being who hides behind it to give himself certain rights and considerations.

Besides, when presenting this mask of his community on his Facebook page, a Yarga (singular of Yarsés) writes:

So that's it, Eureka (we've found it)! The Yarsés now have their own mask. The masks of Zambanga, Bonam, Gaouoga, Zeguedeguin, Lilougou, Dargo, Yaongo, Boulsa, Tougouri, Dabosmnoore, Boala, etc... who thought they were absolute masters, who thought they had a monopoly on violence to bother the Yarsés and Fulani at funerals. This time is over. Habemus masquam (we (Yarsés) have our mask). It

was designed and presented at Zambanga. Whether they agree or not.....Long life mask-like joking kinship

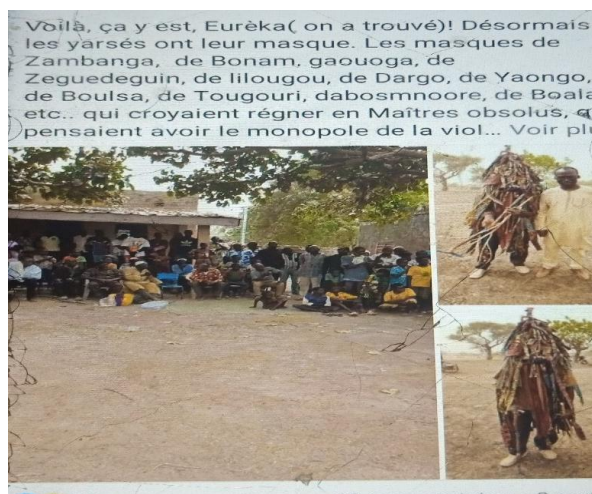


Figure 6. Screenshot of an Ironic Post from a Yarga

- The Fulani and the Yarsés, the masks' pet peeves:

As you can see from this screenshot, the masks hunt down the Yarsés when they go out (for festive events or funerals). The Fulani community is not spared by this phobia about masks. In this environment, it is said that the mask cannot stay under the same tree with the Yarga or the Fulani. A number of stories can be used to describe these "hatreds", as these individuals discover certain mask secrets. For example, old Wumnoogo, a Yarga, tells as follow:

One day, a Yarga who was walking in the bush saw a mask (Note 4) sitting under a tree. The mask beckoned the Yarga to come over. He was trapped by a thorn that had sunk into his foot, because the mask never wears shoes. He helped him to advert the danger. Once they arrived at the village festivities, fearing that the Yarga would reveal the secret of his vulnerability and demystify his supposed ghostly powers, as he had let out shrill cries of distress during the rescue exercise, the mask displayed incredible hostility towards the Yarga. The mask spent all his time chasing the Yarga to isolate him from the crowd in order to prevent him from reporting his misadventure. It was from that day on that the "dislike" between the mask and the Yarga began.

The strained relationship between the mask and the Fulani also seems to be of the same order. According to Dianda (a Fulani):

A Fulani woman laid her calabash of milk on the banks of a backwater to rinse her feet. Hungry, the mask who found this delicious meal did not hesitate. It took the calabash and sent several beneficial mouthfuls to his stomach. But before doing so, it had to remove its mask and leave its head. It was surprised by the Fulani woman who discovered the secret that the mask was a person and not a ghost. From that day on, the mask chase both the Fulani woman and her husband during ceremonies.

These two funny stories explain the origins of the joking kinship between these communities, the consequences of which are seen during funerals. It is impossible for the Yarsés and Fulani to get close like the rest of the crowd to enjoy the masks' dancing. They are obliged to keep away, and despite this precaution, the masks want to fight with them. This is an old tradition of "dislike" that is renewed every time the masks come out.

- Foot-grabbing and a promise of woman: Another sequence no less fun and pleasant takes place during the funeral and specifically at the grave smoothing session. At the cemetery, in order to find a layer of clay soil for the grave polishing ritual, a digging session brings together a crowd. To the beats of drums, a *yagenga* (grandson) will begin digging. He will suddenly stop, pretending to be tired but unexpectedly grab the foot of one of the menopausal women. Some people will run to warn the men of the deceased's family who join the crowd. Only a promise to give a daughter (who will be born from the menopausal women) in marriage to the kidnapper will free the victim. We clearly see that this is a joke, in so far as, moreover, a grandson does not marry this category of girl requested and this girl will never be born since her mother will no longer be able to give birth.

3.2 Place and Role of Choice Given to Joke in Mourning Situation

We have identified two channels through which the joke is played out in mourning periods. These are the joking kinship and the circumstantial joke. In order to examine the place and role of funeral jokes, it is appropriate to recall the importance of the joke in the Moose's daily life. But first, a summary review of the literature on the topic is necessary.

3.2.1 Literature in Jokes: Educational and Social Significance of Kinship, Alliances and Humor

Noret (2017), in this work, shows on the basis of research carried out in Benin the relevance of Balandier's intellectual legacy and the place of a sociology of social change through analyses of African funerals today. According to Balandier, African funerals have always expressed social and power relations as much as beliefs: a dramatization in which society is presented and experienced in a moment of high intensity. Funerals were already very present in social science literature on non-European societies at that time. For example, they held a significant place in the theoretical frameworks of Durkheim and Van Gennep. In the mid-twentieth century, African funerals were also marked by major transformations, linked in particular to urbanization and religious change. And yet, to go in search of evocations of funerals in the work of the Africanist Balandier is to see a political anthropology of funerals taking shape in small ways.

Kouassi (2005), examines the extent to which public funerals are held for the dead. It is a way of paying tribute to those who have passed on, and suggests that in the minds of Africans, death is always an existential and complex reality. In authentic Baoulé society, an ethnic group in the center of Ivory Coast, death is an event that depends on the organization of life, and it is always experienced as a limit to the individual that all societies seek to push back or circumvent by various means. In the authentic Akan-Ashanti tradition, an old man who has lived many years, who has succeeded in life and fulfilled his contract will be the occasion for festivities as he returns to the land of his ancestors, called Bloôlo.

As for the death of a productive and procreative adult, it is perceived as a serious loss that upsets the balance of the survivors. In modern African societies, attitudes towards death are changing, and some viaticum rites are even disappearing in favor of ostentatious and expensive funerals. But whatever the social evolution and modernity, the Baoulé society still preserves the rites of setting the dead on their way to bloôlo, the village of the ancestors.

Pradelles de Latour P, Charles-Henry (1996), by focusing on mourning rather than death, or more precisely on the subjective effects of death rather than its causes and social treatment, the authors have analyzed the funerary rites that are so highly developed in traditional societies. But the various rites of separation described by the authors, which show how the dead person gradually detaches himself from the world of the living to become an impersonal ancestor, the guarantor of the parental and social order, blatantly refute the western conception of mourning that initially oversaw this collective undertaking. It appears that in all the societies studied, death implies a hierarchical classification of the deceased. The head of a lineage with an inheritance receives much longer and more elaborate funeral honors than his wife or wives.

According to Marcel Mauss (1958, p. 16), joking kinship refers to various forms of teasing and verbal indulgence towards an older relative, the aim of which is to achieve *"a relaxation and compensation necessary to the life of the group"*. For Radcliffe-Brown (1950 and 1952), these "joking kinships" were forms of management of socio-familial relations between people of different social status and age, while Marcel Griaule (1954, p. 39) speaks of public release and outlet, described as a "cathartic alliance".

Let us remember that alliances and joking kinships are forms of social communication between relatives having different positions within the family or between different ethnic groups but who have experienced a common historical event in the distant past. (Kouraogo, 2013, p. 126). Their purpose is to use laughter to regulate possible sources of tension within the society. They enable people from different communities and ethnic groups to socialize and play down situations that would otherwise lead to open conflict. From an anthropological point of view, joking kinship is one of those institutions that help to immerse the community, or certain parts of it, in the joy of living, like games and masks. It is therefore a form of social dramatization.

Starting from the logic that "relatives" (congenital or by marriage) can quarrel but cannot and must never deny each other and that the Moose express this sacred character of kinship through expressions such as: *"Friendship ends but kinship remains and cannot be washed or exchanged like a shirt"*. (Kouraogo, p. 120), they are compelled to insult each other, to make fun of each other to indicate the possibility of disagreement, but they end up by joking to notify the obligation to accept oneself.

Such a turnaround of circumstances may seem shocking to a stranger who would not understand the logic behind it as is the case of having fun while mourning. However, this inversion has the role of softening the atmosphere when it comes to tense situations. It is a form of dramatization which, by pretending to trivialize death and the dead, creates at the same time another climate conducive to

restraint. Demanding taxes for the funeral procession, invading the tomb to ask for compensation, making discourteous remarks towards the dead and his or her biological family are part of this trivialization.

According to Alain Sissao (2002, p. 6), joking kinship, or *rakiiré*, has a social significance: it acts as a "firewall", defusing many tensions by avoiding conflicts between two localities; forming a "historical library" for safeguarding social peace and tranquility, and becoming a "home of civic culture and respect for others".

In a nutshell, kinship and joking alliance have a great educational impact through the culture of acceptance of others and their culture, patience, self-control, the mixing of cultures. Their practice preserves and strengthens inter-ethnic mutual assistance, social stability and contributes in building the nation.

In addition, the role of regulating tensions in alliances and joking kinships is well known, as this practice holds codes and keys for resolving crises and conflicts, strengthening bonds and bringing protagonists closer together.

Joking (Larousse, 2024) (Note 5) is the act of joking, of having fun, of doing one thing in jest, all the words or acts being intended to make people laugh, to amuse.

In the sociological sense, joking (google, 2024) shows that humorous events (jokes, tricks, wits) are informal moments of sociability that help to disseminate social representations, consolidate links between the members, and produce the political homogeneity of the community on a daily basis.

Humor being close to joking, Douglas (1991, p. 293) describes it as a form of wit which offers a subversive portrayal of reality or a social situation, and highlights its comic, absurd or unusual aspects. The element of subversion can be conveyed by a statement, by a silent gesture, by any process which allows a connection between the "total social situation" in which the humorous event takes place and the event itself. Humor involves bodies, which laugh, move, or on the contrary, tense up if the humorous event fails.

According to Louis-Vincent (1982, p. 218219),

Amusing the dead, deriding him is telling him that we are going to live without him – life goes on. His departure is not a big loss for the society and he does not lose much by leaving. It also means encouraging him to leave without regret, in peace, without any desire to return to terrorize anyone. The mockery and laughter triggered in the audience facilitate the work of mourning and the settlement of any resentments against the deceased.

Returning to the data of our study, their exploitation can well be used to examine the place and role of jokes in funerals.

Let us acknowledge that the place of joking during times of mourning in the moaaga environment is permanent and important. By describing the forms of joke in the first part, we realize that from the moment the death occurs until the last funeral or the last rite of accompanying the dead on his journey to the afterlife, if this death falls within the framework of acceptable death, the joke is present. As A.

Degorce (2010, p. 27) points out, a death has a positive connotation in the moaaga environment, if it concerns people (men or women) who have succumbed to old age or illness, having reached an advanced age and having been able to “*fulfill their lives*”. Badini Amadé (1978, p. 124) speaks of “*accepted death, more or less expected*”. According to him, what we would call a natural death is the one that occurs according to traditional norms of place, time and manner, and a death is good when it leaves the victim time to take his porridge and make his last recommendations to his family.

Also, at each stage of the funerals - the *Ḳr-fānbegre* or start of the funeral, the *Rag-tiigri* or market tour, the *Yaog-paambo* or grave smoothing and finally the *Ḳr-yisgu* (*Sikri*) or the end of the funeral - the various actors engage in jokes. For example, the retention of the corpse and demands to pay taxes take place during the burial phase, provocative and comical speeches and songs, and physical struggles take place during the burial and during the funeral. The *bi-pagba* (daughters-in-law) and *yagense* (grandsons) also perform jokes from the time of death to the last act of the funerals, as well as quarrels between the yarsés and moaaga masks and the pursuit of the Fulani and Yarsés by the masks. As for the foot-grabbing and the promise of a wife, this takes place at the cemetery during the smoothing of the grave, and the *rag-saasgo* session, which provokes jokes and amusement, and which is held at the market during the funerals. The same goes for the funeral mascot and his joking relative clown.

3.2.2 From Distraction to Psychotherapy: The Rich and Various Functions of Funeral Jokes

We might ask ourselves: Why this almost mechanical omnipresence of jokes during funerals? The answer lies in analyzing the role of jokes. Here, we might well confuse the role and functions of this atypical form of communication in times of grief.

First, we have the distracting function of these jokes. It appears that they are all intended to provoke laughter instead of tears. All the forms described encourage distraction during periods of anxiety where minds can be overwhelmed by sadness due to the voids and memories left by the deceased. By featuring actors who play comedy, the community combines ambivalent feelings of the crying-laughter duel or the laughter-crying duel. Tinga, a surveyed person, hereby expresses his feeling: “*Even those who wanted to dramatize the disappearance of a loved one are quickly brought back to let the atmosphere relax given the diversity of forms of joke developed*”.

Then, a symbolic function of the victory of life over death. Trivialize the advent of death by constantly reigning in laughter. Joy becomes a way of defying death and telling it that no one is afraid of it.

Louis-Vincent (1982, pp. 239-240), gives a good illustration of this situation in the following terms: The dead must be amused and flattered by the spectacle of their familiar attitudes, making fun of the attributes of social life. Is this not a way of denouncing the futility of individual earthly existence and even the inanity of death? Is not the human being invited to continue beyond the event of death? The death of an individual does not end life; it becomes, not a loss, but a “gain of life” and social peace.

Furthermore, we can mention the psychotherapeutic function. Paul-Marie, another surveyed person put it: “*Death is a traumatic experience because no one can know what will happen after one passes away. To soften the blow, good doses of jokes goes are welcome*”. This is a testament to the fact that jokes

revive the spirits of loved ones and even all members of the community. *“Humor and mockery are part of the game in order to lighten the audience. It is necessary to trivialize the dead, to minimize the loss that the death of an individual represents for the group, hence the insults and mockery of the joking relatives”*, Louis-Vincent (1982, p. 247).

Jokes also have a social function. Indeed, developing the forms of these jokes requires the social mobilization of various actors. During funeral events, the whole community stands in solidarity so that each member plays their part in expressing solidarity, compassion and cohesion. As Mr. Sibiri, son of a deceased person, points out:

When we see the general mobilization shown by everyone, not just to carry out all the necessary tasks but also to play jokes, as the first concerned (as sons and brothers) of the deceased, we no longer have the right to feel alone. We see that everyone shares our grief and the deceased seems to be unanimous.

These jokes have a cultural function too. They contain important elements of the community's culture. For example, the release of the masks testifies that the community has mask societies, and their release is an exhumation of all the rituals and functions of the mask. The cultural roles of grandsons, daughters-in-law and communities of joking relatives are also highlighted in these games. These jokes are an abundance of expressions of intangible cultural heritage, defined by the convention (UNESCO, 2003) as all:

the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge and skills, and the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith, that communities, groups and, where appropriate, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage... .

Our objects of study are indeed community practices having meanings for all members. They express meanings, contain knowledge and skills and, above all, use a set of cultural tools and gestures known and accepted by all as best reflecting their belonging to this cultural community. Intangible cultural heritage is revealed in the areas of traditions, oral expressions, performing arts, social practices, rituals and festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe, skills linked to traditional craftsmanship. By analogy, these jokes embody centuries-old traditions, habits and customs, are used as means of expressing the dynamics of a human community and contain in their forms some dimensions: artistic (dances and songs), ritual (struggles, fights) dimensions.) and festive events (popular festivities), etc.

Finally, the different forms of jokes studied contain, each, an undeniable educational function. If, by educational, we mean any situation or phenomenon which, in its expression, reveals lessons and experiences for oneself or others to remember for future cases, we conclude that these jokes serve as lessons in morality, life and learning. They illustrate that every human being is mortal and that there is no point in languishing when death comes. They teach each member of the community to always be in solidarity with others so as to benefit in return from this outpouring of compassion. They show that all members, rich or poor, are equal when it comes to death and will all benefit from the respect and consideration of the community if they behave in accordance with the social prescriptions laid down

and decreed in their education. Despite these rich functions, there are a number of drawbacks.

4. Discussion

At the end of this qualitative research on funeral jokes in the moaaga environment, it is appropriate to emphasize the richness of these sociocultural practices with their multiple functions. In the social representation of the Moose, holding funerals without these amusing moments can be experienced as a social psychodrama in the sense that they would be seen as unsuccessful because they were not very cheerful. Yet, funerals are considered as a form of homage to loved ones and a final accompaniment of the deceased by the living on their journey to the afterlife.

Nevertheless, we will identify some discussion points from the results with a view to opening up prospects.

-First, it should be noted that with revealed religions and modernity, not only are traditional funerals disappearing but even more so are funeral jokes. The Christian and Muslim religions are accountable for this situation as they considered these practices as ancestral and outdated. It is true that they themselves often use these jokes but not all forms are practiced. For example, wearing masks, other traditional dances or different rites are prohibited. Thus, with the high rates of conversion of members of each village community, the number of funerals eligible for these practices is decreasing. What would become of these practices if we project ourselves into twenty years?

-Secondly, according to our observations, there are hardly any innovations in these games to make them more attractive. Almost all the members of the village community and visiting neighbors are familiar with the formats that are repeated at every funeral celebration. This creates monotony in practice and there is little added value. They become mechanical acts that are carried out without any real appropriation by the upcoming generations.

- In addition, we observed that there is no pedagogy accompanying these joking practices, which does not allow the participants to understand the meanings and symbolism of the acts in order to ensure their perpetuation. In fact, it would have been instructive if the practical jokes were followed by short explanations of the appropriateness of any given act. In this way, young people, who are generally curious, would know why and how to act in each case. This is the best way to ensure that this heritage is appropriated and passed on.

Finally, we suggest more actions to promote this aspect of joking kinship or funerals. We are currently witnessing all kinds of events to promote joking kinship in Burkina Faso. More and more Burkinabe are realizing the usefulness of this cultural phenomenon, especially in the current security crisis, where cohesion is compromised. Unfortunately, this aspect of joking in the context of mourning is not being promoted. Yet it can achieve the same objectives, namely to lighten the atmosphere by trivializing the phenomenon of death and, above all, to cultivate social cohesion. Extending this study to several communities will enable us to draw conclusions about the cross-cutting nature of these practices, which could be considered national.

Acknowledgement

In short, based on the hypothesis that jokes take many forms during funerals in the moaaga environment, play an important place in relaxing the atmosphere, and fulfil multiple functions that ennoble their sociocultural role of choice, this research has achieved conclusive results.

In fact, it turns out that funerals, which are occasions for crying, are also occasions for laughter because several forms of joking are played out. On the one hand, we have intergroup jokes already in a situation of “joking kinship”. These include, during the burial, the retention of the corpse and demands to pay taxes to allow the funeral procession to move forward, provocative speeches and songs aimed at expressing a certain joy at the departure of the joking ally, and physical struggles. On the other hand, we have circumstantial intergroup jokes. These are the jokes developed by the *bi-paagba* (daughters-in-law), the *yagense* (grandsons) and the funeral crowd. The former take part in the various dances, the musical entertainment and the sacrificial rites of chicken and cattle in an atypical and comic way. The latter, grandsons/granddaughters, will claim from their uncles and aunts (*pugdba*) money, portions of meat, local beer (*dolo*) and food, as heirs in the court of the deceased uncle. Among the jokes played by specific individuals are the character of *Kv-togsa* (funeral announcer) or the funeral mascot and his clown, the *yarsés* mask which imitates the moaaga one, the chases of the Fulani and Yarsés by the masks and the grabbing of a woman’s foot by a *yagenga* (grandson) followed by a promise of a wife.

As for the place and role of choice given to joking in a situation of mourning, let us remember that the answer to the question of why this quasi-mechanical omnipresence of forms of joking during funerals outlines the different functions of this phenomenon.

Hence, these jokes have a distracting function, as they all aim to provoke laughter instead of tears, a symbolic function of the victory of life over death through the trivialization of the advent of death, a social function in the sense that we can see the social mobilization of various actors. These jokes also have a cultural function, since they contain important elements of the community's culture, and finally an undeniable educational function through the lessons of solidarity and compassion learned. At the end of this qualitative research on funeral jokes in the moaaga environment, it is appropriate to emphasize the richness of these sociocultural practices with their multiple functions. However, it should be noted their relaxation or possible disappearance with revealed religions and modernity, the lack of innovations making them less attractive and the absence of pedagogy allowing the understanding of the meanings and the symbolisms by the participants. We suggest that more action be taken to promote this aspect of kinship and funerals in order to safeguard this rich intangible cultural heritage.

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Notes

Note 1. With capital M, Moose designates the plural of the inhabitants of Moogo (a territorial entity) and the singular is a Moaaga. In addition, moose (plural) and moaaga (singular) in lowercase denote adjectives.

Note 2. Supreme ruler of the Moose

Note 3. Veronique Nana is from the moaaga ethnic group. She is also the mother of a Priest concelebrant

Note 4. In the collective imagination among the Moose, the mask is a ghost that lives in the

Note 5. <https://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/plaisanterie/61341>: consulted on April 13, 2024